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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

19 April 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Likelihood of Soviet Antimissile Claims and Demonstrations in the Near Future

1. In a series of estimates, beginning with NIE 11-4-60, "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1960-1965," published 1 December 1960, we have drawn attention to the political and psychological advantages which the Soviets would expect to obtain from early deployment of an antimissile system, even one of limited military effectiveness. A number of considerations, set forth below, lead us to believe that the USSR will make a strenuous effort, within the next few weeks or months, to persuade the world that it has an operational antimissile capability.

2. The Image of Soviet Strength. Moscow sets great store on cultivating a worldwide belief in Soviet military superiority. This effort has in the past depended heavily on claims in the strategic missile field, but Khrushchev recognizes that recent US statements and press stories, based in part on a new Washington

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estimate of Soviet ICBM strength, have blunted this approach for the time being, especially among NATO governments.

3. Effect of Forthcoming US Demonstrations. The Soviets know that the US is on the verge of Nike-Zeus systems tests. They must reckon on at least some US successes at Kwajalein, accompanied by widespread publicity. They must feel themselves under considerable pressure to show even greater progress and to do this before the first US successes.

4. Nuclear Testing. It seems certain that the Soviets will resume nuclear testing after, and perhaps hard upon, the beginning of US testing in the atmosphere. This will provide them with an opportunity for any high-altitude detonations they wish to undertake and publicize as part of an effort to demonstrate an anti-missile capability.

5. Preparatory Propaganda. The Soviet press and radio have given considerable play to Malinovsky's October statement that the "problem of destroying rockets in flight" have been "solved." More recently, Khrushchev's statement on a "global rocket" has been used to support a claim that US warning and defense systems are useless. These two propositions appear designed to prepare

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the ground for assertions that the USSR has an effective anti-missile defense and that the US has not.

6. Status of the Soviet ABM Program. The Soviets probably have conducted firings against incoming ballistic missiles, and their 1961 nuclear test series included detonations designed to determine the ability of antimissile system radars to track in the presence of debris and ionization from nuclear bursts. They probably are ready for complete ABM system testing, and they may have begun the construction of operational sites. Thus the USSR may be in a position to make claims which have a substantial basis in fact and could be demonstrated in a genuine fashion.

7. Possible Soviet Claims. In view of the impending US tests, and considering past patterns of Soviet military propaganda, the Soviets are unlikely to confine themselves to claiming parity with the US or a slight lead. Instead, they will probably employ sensational yet imprecise assertions to suggest an antimissile capability already in being and highly effective against all kinds of enemy missiles. They will be concerned to influence official US appraisals, but even more to make a great impact on general opinion. Thus, if they are not yet ready to undertake demonstrations

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convincing to specialists, or if security considerations preclude disclosure, the Soviets will nevertheless search for ways to make their asserted capabilities widely credible. To this end, they might publish photographs of objects described as antimissile missiles and launching sites. They might print stories concerning the activities of antimissile units, or publicly designate a Commander of Antimissile Forces. They might publish photographs, faked or genuine, of the destruction of one missile in flight by another.

8. Possible Demonstrations. The Soviet leaders will recognize, however, that the success of these efforts will depend heavily upon some actual achievement generally accepted as valid, much as the credibility of their early ICBM claims rested on the first sputniks. This achievement might be the interception of a missile over Kamchatka, accompanied by as much publicity as was consistent with security requirements. They would expect this feat to be accepted by the US Government and would hope that Washington would be compelled to confirm their public claims.

9. Finally, they might attempt to destroy a satellite in orbit, calculating that most uniformed people would be ready to equate this feat with the interception of an ICBM. If this were

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an actively transmitting satellite, the USSR could count on foreign tracking stations to confirm its destruction. In our estimates, we have pointed out that the USSR could probably intercept a satellite by antimissile facilities in about 1963 (provided that such facilities were suitably modified) or perhaps even earlier by a jury-rigged ballistic missile. Considering the Soviet concern to inhibit US reconnaissance satellite programs, the probable present status of antimissile programs in the USSR, and other inconclusive but suspicious evidence on Soviet tracking and other related activities, we now believe the chances are at least even that the USSR will soon be prepared to attempt a satellite interception. While we cannot exclude the possibility of attack upon a US satellite, we think it more likely that a Soviet vehicle would be the target for such an initial effort.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES. /

SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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